

11. A system for applying electrical energy to tissue at a target site comprising:
an electrosurgical instrument having a shaft with a proximal end, a distal end
and one or more electrode terminals at the distal end of the shaft;
a return electrode;
one or more connectors coupled to the electrode terminals for connecting the
electrode terminals to a high frequency power supply; and
an insulating shield coupled to the distal end of the shaft, the shield having a
distal surface spaced distally from the electrode terminals, such that when the distal surface of
the shield is adjacent to, or in contact with, tissue at a target site, the shield forms a chamber
between the electrode terminals and the tissue.
12. The system of claim 11 wherein the return electrode is positioned on the
instrument and spaced proximally from the electrode terminals.
13. The system of claim 11 wherein the return electrode is positioned within the
chamber and spaced from the electrode terminals.
14. The system of claim 11 comprising a single active electrode terminal.
15. The system of claim 11 comprising a plurality of electrically independent
electrode terminals.
16. The system of claim 11 comprising a plurality of non electrically independent
electrode terminals.
17. The system of claim 11 wherein the electrode terminals and the return
electrode are configured, upon the application of a sufficient high frequency voltage in the
presence of electrically conductive fluid, to generate a plasma within the chamber.
18. The system of claim 17 wherein the plasma is generated at a location spaced a
distance of about 0.05 to 5 mm from the tissue, wherein the electrode terminals and the return
electrode are configured, upon the application of a sufficient high frequency voltage in the

presence of electrically conductive fluid, to accelerate ions from the plasma in the chamber such that the ions contact the tissue, the ions having sufficient energy to ablate the contacted tissue.

19. The system of claim 11 further comprising a fluid delivery element having a distal opening coupled to the chamber for delivering electrically conductive fluid into the chamber around the electrode terminals.

20. The system of claim 11 further comprising an aspiration lumen having distal opening coupled to the chamber for aspirating fluid from the chamber.